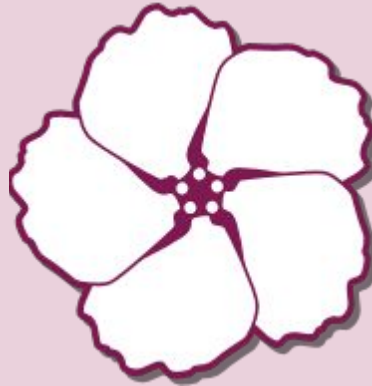


# Before Starting Your Application

Application Guide Series: Episode 3



“Before Starting Your Application” is the third episode in the Rock Rose Foundation Application Guide video series. We recommend watching all the episodes to have a full understanding of our grant application process and expectations. In this video we will talk about the planning, development and research necessary BEFORE you even consider applying for a grant.

It’s important to note that this video series is specifically designed with the Rock Rose Foundation grant application in mind. While much of the information may be helpful in completing applications for other grants, you should ALWAYS make sure you are aware of each individual grant’s rules and expectations.

# Prepare Your Organization/Program

- **Identify a need**
  - Who are the stakeholders?
  - What has already been tried?
  - What is your unique solution?
- **Assemble your team**
  - Who is responsible for what?
  - What resources can each person commit - time, treasure, talent?
- **Develop your program**
  - Purpose/Mission
  - Strategic Plan
    - Goals (what)
    - Objectives (why)
    - Actions (how)
- **Develop your budget**
  - How much money do you need?
  - How do you plan to spend it?

A surprising amount of the work involved in applying for a grant happens long before you ever open the grant application. The best way to increase your chances of receiving a grant is to make sure you've laid solid groundwork for your organization and your program. We have created a grant application checklist that summarizes this process. You can find links to that and other resources mentioned in this video on our website.

The first step is identifying an unfulfilled need in your community and determining how you and your organization can address that need in a new or more effective way. It is very important to do your research at this step. Make connections within the community. Get to know the stakeholders already involved, including local government officials, community leaders, other organizations and their staff, engaged donors, and, of course, the people you hope to impact through your work.

Then you have to assemble your team. Identify what roles are necessary for your organization to function smoothly and develop strong policies and procedures to keep you on track. Make sure it is clear what each person's responsibilities are and what resources each participant is bringing to the table. Look for passionate, committed individuals who are

ready to work as hard as you are to make your organization or program a success.

Once you have a strong team, it's time to develop your program. A clearly stated mission will help guide future decisions and a thoughtful strategic plan will outline the steps necessary to turn your vision into reality. This is where you decide exactly what you are trying to accomplish, why it's important, and how you're going to do it. If you cannot clearly explain your mission and strategic plan, it will be very hard to convince people to give you money. You can find links to the "Introduction to Strategic Planning" workshop we hosted with Lavin Strategies on our website. I will speak a little more about mission statements on the next slide.

Finally, you have to develop your budget. There are three components to a strong budget:

- How much money do you have?
- How much money do you need?
- How do you intend to spend your money?

Although we accept budgets in whatever format you are already using, we have created a budget template and a sample budget for those who are new to budgeting. They can be found on our website as well. I will discuss budgeting further in episode 5.

# Mission Statements

## The Cause

What is the issue? Who is affected? Where is the location or specific community?

## The Action

What are you doing to improve the cause?

## The Result

What impact does the action have on the cause?

Source: [InsideCharity.org](http://InsideCharity.org)

## The Good and the Bad

A Good Statement...	A Bad Statement...
Uses language your constituents use.	Uses jargon, doesn't understand your audience.
Is emotionally stirring.	Is logical and cold.
Communicates the "why."	Communicates only the "what" or "how."
Is concise.	Is really long.
Is a single, powerful sentence.	Is a rambling paragraph.
Sounds good spoken out loud.	Is full of clauses and hard to say.
Is memorable.	Is forgettable.
Surprises.	Is dull.
Is actionable.	Can't be quantified.
Is specific.	Is vague.

There are many resources out there on how to write a good mission statement. Here is a graphic from an article by Inside Charity that covers the basics in an easily digestible way. You can find the whole article linked on our website. In short, your mission statement should explain what issue you are trying to address, how you wish to address it, and the impact you hope to have on that issue in as few words as possible.

# Types of Grants

Rock Rose Foundation provides all three of these types.

**NOTE:** Different types of grants come with different expectations, reporting, and restrictions.

**Outstanding Applicants...**  
are able to identify which kind of grant they need and why!

## Operating Grants

- Support general mission
- Unrestricted (not tied to specific expense)
- Can cover day to day costs (including rent or salaries)

## Program Grants

- support single project or activity
- tied to specific project-based outcomes

## Capacity Building Grants

- funds for board and staff development, technological assistance and upgrades, or strategic planning

There are many different types of grants available through a variety of sources. It's a good idea to become familiar with websites and databases that gather this information. Here, I'm going to talk about four of the most common grants.

Operating grants provide unrestricted funds to support the general mission of an organization. These funds are not tied directly to specific actions or expenses. Instead, they can be used to cover the day-to-day expenses of managing an organization. These expenses can include staff salaries, rent, utilities, equipment, training, and more. You will be asked to provide structure and budget information for your entire organization if you are requesting an operating grant. These grants provide the most flexibility for the recipient, but it can be difficult to secure operating grants because many funders would rather support specific programs.

Program grants are funds provided to cover the costs of a specific program or activity. These funds can only be spent within the parameters outlined on the signed grant agreement. Some program grant applications only require structure and budget information about the specific program involved or the branch of your organization responsible for that program.

Many funders are more comfortable offering program grants because they feel less risky and it is easier to monitor “success.”

Capacity building grants provide funds specifically for growing your organization. This could include board development, strategic planning, staff training, expanding or upgrading technology, or hiring professional service providers. Applications for capacity building grants should explain exactly what the funds will be used for and how they will contribute to the growth of the organization or program. These kinds of grants can also be difficult to get. You can strengthen your application by explaining how organizational or programmatic growth will ultimately benefit the community or contribute to the funding organization’s overall mission.

Rock Rose Foundation has given out operating, program, and capacity building grants in the past and expects to continue doing so in the future.

# Research Your Potential Grant Partners

## Overall Fit

- Do you meet their eligibility requirements?
  - Location
  - Area of focus
- Do you have shared goals, values, & priorities?
- Do they offer the type of grant you need?
- Have they funded organizations like yours in the past?
- Does their funding level match your need?

## Granting Process

- When do they accept applications?
  - Deadlines?
- What are the steps in their application process?
- How long should you expect to wait for a decision (and funding)?
- What are their reporting expectations?

One of the most overlooked steps in preparing to apply for a grant is researching your potential grant provider. Knowing more about a grantor can help you determine if applying is a good use of your time. It can also help you tailor your pitch to their specific interests, goals, and priorities. We have created a grant research worksheet to help with this process. You can find it linked on our website.

Understanding the sizes and types of grants being offered, as well as their purpose and eligibility criteria, can help you focus your efforts toward grant opportunities with the greatest potential for success. Most granting organizations, including Rock Rose Foundation, have this information, along with lists of past recipients and an outline of the entire application process, readily available on their websites.

You may also want to review social media, news articles, and nonprofit review sites to see what else you can learn about the organization. Knowing who you are looking to partner with is a good way to keep your organization safe, as well as providing clues on how to best convince grantors you are a good fit.

Episodes 1 and 2 of this series provide much of the information you need to know about Rock Rose Foundation. You can also find us on Facebook.



# Anatomy of a Basic Application

- **Cover Page**
  - Contact Information
  - Eligibility Research
  - Legal & IRS
- **Narrative Questions**
  - Getting to know you and your program
- **Budget**
  - What do you have?
  - How are you using it?
- **Budget Narrative**
  - Explain the numbers
  - Answer questions in advance
- **Additional Attachments**
  - Back up your application with evidence

We will cover our specific application in detail in episodes 4 and 5 of this series, but you can expect most grant applications to include these items:

- A cover page to collect basic contact info and the legal details of your organization
- Narrative questions where you describe more about your organization and your program
- A budget spreadsheet where you list the funds you have and the funds you need
- A budget narrative where you describe how you plan to spend your funds, and
- An opportunity to provide documents to support your application

Rock Rose Foundation has tried to streamline our application as much as possible. Other organizations may ask for additional information. ALWAYS make sure you are following the guidelines and expectations of each specific organization and application.

# What if I'm Not a Strong Writer?

- **DO** your best to be professional and accurate.
- **DO** let your passion and personality shine through!
- **DO** trust yourself and your vision!
- **DO** ask someone you trust to review your application.
  - Spelling, grammar, & punctuation
  - Clarity - does it make sense?
- **DON'T** stress about small mistakes - We're not perfect and we don't expect you to be.
- **DON'T** wait until the last minute to get started.
- **DON'T** rely on AI to write for you.
  - **This is important!** We can tell because AI gives the same basic answers to everyone.

I want to take a moment to talk about writing, particularly writing with the help of AI.

In short, we don't recommend it. AI-written answers often lack personality and the specific details that make your organization or program different from everyone else. We can tell you from experience that AI gives just about the same answer to everyone who inputs the same questions. In past cycles, we've received several applications with almost identical wording for certain questions.

We would much rather hear YOUR voice coming through. While it's always a good idea to make your best effort at sounding professional, we are willing to overlook the occasional spelling or grammar mistake. AI will never be able to explain your vision with the same passion and specificity as you. Instead of turning to AI, we recommend giving yourself plenty of time to work on the application and asking a trusted friend to read it when it's done. Fresh eyes can often spot mistakes you've missed or point out areas where a few more details are needed.

If you DO use AI, we recommend doing some heavy editing to make it's

stock answers original to you. Where it says you will “create a plan,” you need to add specifics about the plan you’ve created! Where it says you will “create a diverse range of activities,” you need to list those activities out for us.

In summary, we care more about your program and your passion than your ability to write perfectly.

# General Application Tips

If you don't understand something, **REACH OUT.**

- **Read the WHOLE application before starting!**
  - Eligibility requirements or restrictions
  - Deadlines & timelines
  - Necessary info/documents
  - Formatting & word count
- **Make the most of your first impression**
  - Take your time & submit your best effort.
  - Submit BEFORE the deadline!
  - Wait for the next cycle if you're not ready now.
- **Prioritize your time/resources**
  - Do your prep work.
  - Start with the grants you are most likely to get.
  - Finish what you start.
  - Save your answers for future applications.

We have identified some tips on how to make your application rise to the top. These are based on the mistakes we saw frequently during our previous cycles.

First, stop and read the application all the way through. Make sure you are actually eligible for the grant. Note important dates and requirements like word count or formatting. Take notes on what information or documents you need to gather.

Don't rush! Your grant application submission is often your first impression with a potential partner and you want to make the most of it. Take the time to review your work carefully before hitting "submit".

That said, ALWAYS plan to submit well before the deadline. Life is always life-ing, and you don't want a sick day, a flat tire, or a last minute power outage to cause you to miss the deadline. We even have a "preliminary deadline" to encourage applicants to submit early. We HATE having to be the bad guys, but we absolutely DO NOT accept any late applications.

Not all granting organizations are willing or able to provide direct support,

but at Rock Rose Foundation we try to be accessible during the entire application process. We know how intimidating it can be to fill out that first grant application. If you get stuck, reach out. We might have an answer or a resource that can get you moving again.

Remember, our grant cycle happens every year. If you are not ready to submit a strong application by this year's deadline, consider holding off until the next cycle. A poorly prepared application is worse than no application at all.

Finally, even though applications can be time consuming, there are some ways you can maximize your time and resources. Start with grants you are most likely to get. Once you start an application, finish it! And, most importantly, save your answers somewhere. Most applications have similar kinds of questions. Keeping a collection of past answers means you don't have to start from scratch every time.

# Thanks!

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Time to get started on that application checklist!

You can find links to the resources mentioned in this video on our website at [www.rock-rose.org](http://www.rock-rose.org). Our executive director, Kelsey Hunt, is happy to answer questions about the foundation and our grant application. You can reach her directly via email: [kelsey@rock-rose.org](mailto:kelsey@rock-rose.org).

In the next video, called “How to Talk About Your Organization,” we will talk about how to respond to Rock Rose Foundation application questions about your organization’s structure, goals, and programming.